

# Jackson Police Chief James E. Davis

## Learning to hear from God

by KATIE EUBANKS



"People often ask me about (my cross pin), and I get an opportunity to tell them about Jesus," Chief Davis said. "He died for all our sins; none is perfect. If we just confess our sins, He is our Redeemer."

**W**hen you walk into Jackson Police Chief James E. Davis' office, you're immediately drawn to the open Bible on the windowsill. The window offers Davis a daily view of the city he serves.

Anybody can say he starts his day reading the Bible and praying, as Chief Davis does. But the more you hear from him, the more you realize he's a man who seeks to hear from God.

That's a skill he's had to learn over the years — and one he desperately needs in his job.

### From the ranch to the academy

James Davis, 68, was born the third of eight children in Natchez. He learned hard work, respect and integrity both from his natural parents — Gloria Davis and the late James Young — and a second set of parents in Natchez.

When James was 8 years old, he and his brother Curtis started working summers and after school at a cutting horse ranch owned by the late Phil Vasser. Phil and his wife, Juanita,

also never had children of their own. In addition to dressing horses, feeding cutting grass and building fences, Phil and Curtis attended Vasser family cookouts, became like sons to Phil and Juanita. (Chief Davis' mother estranged relationship, he said.)

"At the ranch, I learned it's hard, more, have faith and believe you'll get through."

From Natchez, he moved to Jackson, he worked as a hall attendant, and the school suspension coordinator at N-School. One of the teachers who was a police officer suggested he go to the JPD Training Academy.

"So I went, through basic training, trained really, really well. And I was a policeman."

That's when he had to start pray-

### His first call

When Chief Davis took over as an officer in the early '90s, he



midnight shift, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. His first solo job was one that ultimately sharpened his focus on God and His Word.

"I was so excited to be solo," he said. "Now, I'm not being babysat (as a recruit) anymore. Now I've got this. I came to work at 10 (p.m.), I got out of roll call, and I said I'm 10-6, which means I'm in service."

While patrolling, he received his first call. Shots fired.

"When I got on the scene, I saw that it was a homicide. A teenage girl had been shot. That was the first time I had seen a deceased person. I had to put my training together really, really quick," he said.

"I did a lot of praying to try to understand, how could someone take someone's life? How? A lot of sleep."

The homicide turned out to be an accident. Still, he was shaken up. He found comfort in prayer and scripture.

The Bible says God will give you wisdom. I read about the wisdom of Solomon. . . . And I started understanding the importance of (police) work," he said. "I believe it's doing God's work."

### Mr. Mississippi and 'spiritual fitness'

As strange as it may sound, another thing that led Chief Davis closer to God was bodybuilding.

Fresh-ups and all ups came naturally to him at the police academy. Then a former officer who had competed in bodybuilding challenged him to do the same. Davis trained and competed from 1995 to 2008, and he won Mr. Mississippi in 1998.

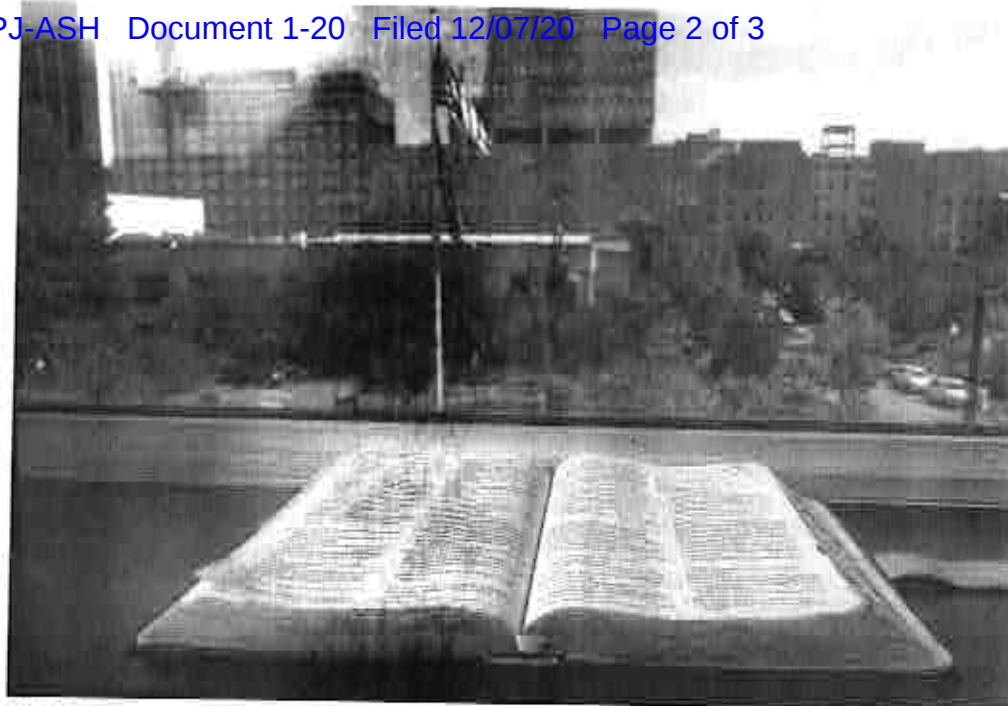
"More people knew me from bodybuilding than as an officer, because I was on the midnight shift (for a time)," he said.

He also trained private-fitness clients on the side. The following is an approximation of his summer schedule during his bodybuilding years:

- 10 p.m.-6 a.m.: Work JPD shift
- Morning: Train fitness clients
- Afternoon: Sleep a few hours
- 5-7 p.m.: Work out
- Evening: Sleep a couple hours, then go back to work and start all over.

"When you're training and working, (God is) all you have. It's like fasting," he said. "If you're depriving your body of good food that you love eating, and you're depriving yourself of sleep . . . it takes a lot of spiritual discipline."

"I looked forward to the summer because it brought me closer to God."



Chief Davis starts his day reading this Bible in his office and praying over Mississippi's capital city.

Even in the off season, if he needed spiritual strength or wisdom, "I would go into bodybuilder mode, and I would fast and pray. And I would get the answer."

When he enters the plans to promote bodybuilding again, he said, "I call it spiritual fitness."

### 'We cannot put everyone in jail'

Chief Davis never imagined he would be chief. He did join SWAT and became the range master at the academy. But he was planning to retire once he hit 25 years. Then in 2009 he took the sergeant's exam, and "God

job was for the Spirit of God to hover and soften the hearts of people with pure intentions, and to comfort the people crying out (for justice). That is still my prayer."

Late last year, a multi-agency task force called Targeting Gun Violence was formed in response to a rash of shooting deaths in Jackson, which saw 82 homicides in 2019—nearly equalling the 84 that occurred in 2018, the highest number in more than 20 years. The task force resulted in dozens of arrests on charges including murder, aggravated assault, and armed robbery. But more work is needed.

Chief Davis has asked the Jackson City Council for desperately needed funds—both to hire additional officers and to pay existing officers more.

JPD did receive some funding in the form of a "hot spot" grant to install a couple dozen cameras in residential and commercial areas in south Jackson, and the impact has been positive, Chief Davis said. He hopes to sprinkle such cameras throughout the city as funding becomes available. "We went to New Orleans and Chicago and (LAPD), and cameras made a big decrease in their crime."

But the biggest tool JPD has, he says, is service. Chief Davis believes the more an officer interacts with people on his or her beat, the less enforcement will be needed. "And (those interactions do) so much more for the officers, because it reminds them (why they do the job)."

He learned this from personal experience. In the mid-'90s, he saw a teen boy walking the



STELLA HANCOCK

kept promoting me," he said, until Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba appointed him chief in 2018.

"Now I really have to pray more, because I'm dealing with a lot more citizens, churches, business owners, schools, and the community," he said.

"My prayer when the mayor offered me the



## GENERAL RULES FOR CITY EMPLOYEES Section 3 - Page 1

*Revision Date: 1/5/96*

### 3.1 Political Activities

3.1.1 Employees are specifically prohibited from engaging in political activities, including, but not limited to, campaigning, handing out campaign literature, posting signs, and soliciting support or donations, at any time while on duty, while wearing a City uniform, or while on City premises; provided, however, employees may participate in public political meetings on City property. City employees may not use City funds or equipment for the purpose of providing support or opposition to a candidate or a ballot measure. City employees may not solicit political contributions from other City employees nor from persons on *eligibility lists* for City jobs. Employees may make appeals to the public generally, even though such appeals may include City employees.

3.1.2 The political activities of City employees are restricted by certain State and Federal laws. Employees of the City shall obey all such applicable laws.

3.1.3 Nothing stated herein shall be construed as limiting any employee's right to vote, or freedom of reasonable expression or right of association, nor the exercise of any rights protected by the Constitution of the United States of America and the State of Mississippi.

#### 3.1.4 *Employee Involvement in Political Campaign Activity*

3.1.4.1 Public employees should work in an atmosphere free from political influence or coercion.

3.1.4.2 No employee shall be pressured to contribute to a political fund or render any political service.

3.1.4.3 While City employees are encouraged to participate in community service programs of a charitable, educational, religious, fraternal, civic or political nature, employees are prohibited from engaging in any of these activities during working hours or using property or equipment of the City in the pursuit of such activities, unless specifically authorized in writing by the Mayor's Office.

3.1.4.4 Employees of the City who are involved in community affairs that require extended periods of time away from their jobs

